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ABSTRACT

This monograph is one of 12 that address various topics in the area of CETA/education linkages. They were designed to provide those individuals interested in the development and implementation of CETA/education linkages with information that will serve to enhance the quality of existing programs and facilitate the efficient and effective development of new programs. This monograph looks at the problem of program fluctuation and more specifically the elimination of drop-out within CETA programs. The factors that are reviewed include (1) organization/system design; (2) counseling; (3) staff; (4) program design; (5) job placement/employability; (6) facilities. The purpose of reviewing these techniques is to provide the CETA professional with possible suggestions that may be implemented to stabilize program enrollment by eliminating the client drop-out. (CT)

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TECHNIQUES FOR THE ELIMINATION OF DROP-OUTS WITHIN CETA PROGRAMS

by

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He has authored numerous articles and monographs in the areas of competency-based education and instructional techniques. Additionally, he has conducted various workshops for vocational and CETA educators and has served as a private consultant. As a faculty member in the Division of Vocational-Technical Education at Virginia Tech, he currently teaches graduate and undergraduate classes and conducts research in the area of CETA/Education Linkages.

FOREWORD

Since the enactment of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), 1973, there has been a continued need to develop cooperative relationships between (1) local prime sponsors, (2) public and private educational institutions, and (3) community based organizations. While this concern seems to exist for a variety of reasons, it is commonly recognized that poor communication is a major barrier to effective cooperative relationships in Employment and Training (CETA). This problem continues as little information has been disseminated providing ideas or models for the collaboration of efforts in the employment and training field. The provisions of both CETA and the Vocational Education Act of 1976 have noted this problem.

Recently, the Virginia Governor's Employment and Training Council funded a three phase project titled: "Inservice, Technical Assistance, and Information Dissemination Service for CETA/Education Linkages." One phase of this project provided for the development and dissemination of twelve monographs. The monograph series addresses various topics in the area of CETA/Education Linkages. The purpose of the monographs is to provide those individuals interested in the development and implementation of CETA/Education Linkages with information that will serve to enhance the quality of existing programs and facilitate the efficient and effective development of new programs.

TECHNIQUES FOR THE ELIMINATION OF DROP-OUTS WITHIN CETA PROGRAMS

Introduction

Enrollment fluctuations have long been a problem facing educators and can be attributed to a number of different factors. In many instances, enrollment fluctuations are extremely prevalent when a skill center is forced to operate under mandated budget constraints. With these constraints, placement usually drops and as a result of low enrollment, instructors are forced to leave and facilities remain unused. One advantage of these program closings is that they help reduce the potential surplus of workers within an occupation. Unfortunately, two problems occur simultaneously. First, as funds diminish, programs that prove to be beneficial can be dropped even though their placements may be adequate. Second, once programs are closed it becomes difficult to start them again, if the need arises.

One way to control enrollment and reduce the amount of fluctuation involved in a particular program is to increase the initial number of clients that are admitted. This technique, known as "front-end loading" permits the administrator to admit more clients than will complete the program. As attrition among clients occurs, program enrollments gradually stabilize thus insuring an adequate supply of graduates. Another way to control enrollment is by retaining clients currently in the program.

In this monograph, we shall look at the problem of program fluctuation and more specifically the elimination of drop-outs within CETA programs. Those factors that we shall review will include: (1) organization/system design; (2) counseling; (3) staff; (4) program design; (5) job placement/employability; and (6) facilities. The purpose of reviewing these techniques is to provide the CETA professional with possible suggestions that may be implemented to stabilize program enrollment by eliminating the client drop-out.

Organization/System Design

It is important for CETA professionals to understand that the organization and system design of their operation must be considered when trying to eliminate program drop-outs. The literature has documented that once an individual has dropped out of school, there is a high likelihood that he/she will never return (Mangum, 1978). Consequently, the initial task facing the CETA professional is to design an organizational system that provides credibility to both the training program and the CETA client. This crediability is important since it is also one method to measure accountabilty of the CETA efforts. To maintain a viable program, and to ensure that drop-out rates will be as low as possible, the accountability of the institution must be maintained at all costs.

Second, the CETA professional must insure that all phases of the client's program are integrated, and that a well-defined administrative procedure serves as a base for the total program concept. This is not to say that the clients have no input into the actual development of their programs. On the contrary, the system should be designed so that clients have some input and control over behavior, discipline, and the normal day-to-day rules and regulations of the institution.

Another important part of a design requires that the skill center be operational 12 months a year. This concept is in sharp contrast to traditional education programs that are only available to students from September through June. By increasing the operating hours of the institution, the CETA client realizes that they can complete their training program and obtain unsubsidized employment at an earlier date. More importantly needs can be met on an individual basis.

Care must also be taken that the system be designed to provide the CETA client with a variety of training options. The variety of options is essential, especially to those CETA clients who have never had this opportunity. By offering a number of different training options to the CETA client, the client perceives that their individual, or specific, needs are being met. Consequently, a commitment to the particular institution is developed since the freedom and the flexability to choose, permits them to pursue a training program at the earliest possible moment.

It is important to provide the CETA client with a variety of occupational options, however, this can not be done in isolation. Inasmuch as the majority of today's CETA clients are deficient in numerous areas it is necessary that the design make available to the CETA client various support services as well. It serves little value to provide a CETA client with numerous occupational possibilities if the essential support services to assist the client in reaching his/her training endeavors are absent. Consequently, the institution must take care as to the type, nature, direction, and variety of the support services that are offered. (For a detailed description of the support services see Monograph #6 in this series.)

The support that ancillary services provide to the CETA client are also important as research has shown that the non-traditional student rarely knows of the purpose and intent of these services (Monte & Orthega, 1976). Even those clients who know that the services are available, will seldom seek them out. It is important that the organization be designed to assist the non-traditional student to become familiar with the various types of services available and provide them with the opportunity to seek such services once they are needed. It would not be uncommon to find that many CETA clients fail to see the value of these services. It is up to the administration and the organization of the particular skill center involved to work closely with each CETA client so that they may obtain the optimum use of both the skill center's training component and their support service component.

Finally, it is important that the organization be designed to meet the total spectrum of the clients' needs, emotional, academic, and social. Historically, client emotional needs have been the most difficult to assess and treat. Consequently, it is important that a system be designed to make extensive use of peer modeling, peer reinforcement, and peer contact, so that lasting and intimate frendships can be developed among clients within a training program. These friendships will do much to increase program motivation while at the same time reduce drop-outs. In meeting the client's social needs, it is important that the system be designed to allow the staff to work freely with the CETA client. The intermingling between the client and the staff helps stress the importance of staff interest in the clients, while also helping the client obtain a better perception of himself and other clients as well. The client's academic needs mandates that the client can obtain immediate assistance from counselors to assist in helping them cope with personal or crisis problems. The client must develop long range study habits that will help to complete their current program and provide them with the framework for future job advancement.

Counseling

Another component that must be considered by every CETA professional to eliminate program drop-outs is counseling. Counseling is necessary because of the difficulty involved in seeking out the CETA client to receive the counseling

services. While in some instances the client may recognize an existing problem that can prevent successful completion of their training program, the counseling professional must take active and positive steps to recruit clients into their offices so they can successfully implement various counseling techniques. (Specifically, counseling techniques are discussed in Monograph #1 in this series.)

The role of the professional counselor is developed around the concept of their function. The CETA counselor must take positive and drastic measure to develop the proper attitudes, values, work habits, the building of confidence, and self-discipline for trainees in the program. The importance of these functions leads many individuals to suggest that the counseling component should have priority over skill preparation for employability.

One way to make counseling more effective in reducing drop-outs is to make the counseling services available to the trainee during all phases of their skill training program. In this way the client knows that a competent, capable counselor is available on a daily basis that can help them address problems as they arise. The crisis counseling provided to the CETA client is probably the most vital function a counselor can perform in trying to eliminate drop-outs.

Counseling techniques to increase effectiveness in working with the CETA client are varied. One technique has been the use of success models when ever possible. Many CETA

clients initially question their ability to complete the training program. The questioning is the result of past failure experiences in which they were either told, or indirectly lead to believe, that they did not have the ability to successfully complete the program. The problem that this poses for the counselor and the individual CETA client is monumental. Because of the lack of previous success experiences confronting the CETA client, it is essential that the counselor develop an atmosphere that is conducive to retaining the CETA clients in their respective programs. One technique that can be used to increase the potential of a CETA client completing the program would be to emphasize confidence building. This fact cannot be underestimated, for unless the CETA client has confidence in himself, it is impossible for them to have confidence that they can successfully complete the training program.

Related closely to the concept of confidence building is increasing the CETA clients awareness of other individuals in their training program. It has been said many times that an individual who cannot respect himself cannot respect others. In this light it is important that the counselor use various measures and different techniques to make the client understand that the day has to be productive not only to themselves, but for other individuals as well. Those CETA clients usually dropping out of the training program do so because they lack confidence, but more importantly because they perceive that others hold little concern about their future and well being. Conselors interested in reducing the number of program drop-outs must mold the individuals to create a positive attitude toward themselves and others.

A counseling technique that has proved successful in eliminating program drop-outs involves the accurate identification of personal desires and abilities of the individual CETA client. By identifying the client's occupational preferences and abilities, an individual program with various occuaptional options can be developed for the client. It would be difficult to expect a client to remain in an auto mechanics program if they wanted to become a machinist. In essence, some program drop-outs can be eliminated by providing the trainee with what it is they want to do. CETA clients interested in a particular training program will have a lower tendency of withdrawing from that program. Therefore, it is essential that the counselor work closely, usually on an individual basis, with each CETA client to ensure that they receive the type of training initially desired. Obviously it is the professional counselors role to advise the particular trainee if they are pursuing an occupation in which they are not qualified. Nonetheless, it is important that the counselor match an occupational training program to the client that provides a high probability of placement.

The counselor can also help in reducing program drop-outs by preparing the client to adequately deal with everyday pressures. Unless the client possesses these coping skills it serves little value to press them through an occupational training program that leads to entry level work. The counselor must work with each client and provide them with

all the skills, understanding and knowledge needed to cope with everyday pressures.

One final step that the counselor can take to lower client drop outs is to stress the value of belonging. Client's coming from broken homes usually believe that no one cares what happens to them. They feel isolated and lonely. This feeling of isolation causes many CETA clients to give up and to quit, thus making program elimination a reality. It is the counselor's role to identify, at an early stage, personal problems or interpersonal relationship problems that the individual clients may have and provide a remedy. If successful, they can demonstrate to the CETA client that, in fact, someone does care and is concerned with their future. This is not to promote the philosophy that misery loves company. To do so would produce equally negative results. On the contrary, the counselor must work with the CETA client to show how peer pressure and peer relations can be used to develop the feeling of comradeship needed to face and solve problems as they arise. If a counselor is successful in developing this comradeship they in essence are reducing the amount of contact needed for each individual client. Instead of the client coming to the counselor day after day with problems that appear to be unmanageable, the client, now believing in himself and others, has the tendency to try to solve the problem by himself. Naturally, the success of the client in identifying and handling their own problems depends on the scope and magnitude of the problem which they are confronted. But,

unless the client has the ability to believe in him/herself, he/she will never be able to face problems as they arise. Once the client leaves the skill center they are literally on their own. By having the ability to believe in oneself, the CETA client is better prepared to meet a successful future.

Staff

The skill center staff is another aspect that must be considered when trying to eliminate program drop-outs. This includes the administrators, counselors, ABE and related instructors, and most importantly the skill instructors, since they have the most direct contact with the CETA client. Because of the great impact that the CETA skill center staff has on each client, it is important that staff be hired and assigned based on a number of different criteria. The selection process used in hiring staff members must be reviewed carefully and followed, since they have such a great impact on directly affecting the attitudes and behaviors of the CETA client. Let us review some of the characteristics that research has found to be important for these individuals.

The first characteristic that all instructional staff should possess would be an air of self-confidence. Self-confidence is critical to the instructional staff, since staff not believing in themselves have a rather difficult time in believing in either the client or the institution. Inasmuch as peer modeling and staff modeling can be very

successful in trying to eliminate program drop-outs the staff must be able to demonstrate to the CETA client that they are both competent specialists and instructors. A positive attitude must be exhibited at all times so the CETA client has a clear understanding of the leadership capabilities of each of the staff members.

Second, all instructional staff must show a willingness to help others. They should be extremely verbal and have the capability of being able to be patient while explaining sophisticated concepts. Being an effective instructor is no easy task. A considerable amount of work must be done in the classroom, but a considerable amount of work must also be done on free time after the formal class has ended. In many instances the difference between success and failure of a CETA client is determined primarily by the number of outside hours that the instructor puts into the classroom and working with each client. Instructors that are interested only in putting in the minimum number of hours and punching a time clock when required are usually least effective in dealing with the non-traditional CETA client. It is important that the CETA client perceive the instructor as being helpful and concerned with the client's success within the program. CETA administrators have known from past experiences that the most effective instructors are the instructors that go to any length to insure client success.

A third characteristic that all instructional staff should possess is believing that the client can successfully complete the program. Many clients have probably had some

bitter experiences in which an instructor or a counselor told them that they did not have what it takes. At the same time it would not be uncommon to talk with some instructors and have them tell you that they can tell as soon as a client walks through the door if they're going to make it or not. This perceived attitude of failure on the part of the instructor is easily recognized by the client. If they think that the instructor believes that they cannot make it, they soon prove him correct by giving up and abandoning all possible hope. As a result, it is important that the CETA instructor constantly provide the client with various options to insure success. This may mean considerable amount of work for the instructor with a particular client to strengthen weak areas. It may also mean that the instructor has to work closely with an ABE counselor to make sure that a client has the proper remedial training. In any respect, it is vital that the client think at all times that the instructor is supporting them.

In essence, if a client is lead to believe that he/she can be successful, and is provided with a number of different alternatives, techniques, and auxillary services, they will be successful. As a result, program elimination and drop-out can be reduced greeatly.

These are just a few of the characteristics that a CETA instructor must possess if they are to be successful in eliminating program drop-outs. In additon to these personal characteristics the CETA instructor must also develop different learning techniques that bring success to the CETA

client. These learning techniques must be placed in both the program design and into the instructional practices. One program management technique that the CETA instructor can use to motivate the client is the development of competencies based on actual job skills. Through the use of competencies much of the apprehension prohibiting client success is removed. The use of performance based objectives provides the CETA client with immediate feedback as to the degree of success within their occupation training area. (A more detailed description of this concept can be found in Monograph #5 of this series.)

Related closely to the concept of using performance objectives based on competencies is the technique that involves the use of rewards for accomplishments. To increase motivation and encourage participation it is important that the CETA instructor reward individual clients based on their program accomplishments and success in reaching various goals. The CETA client now has a pre-determined clearly identified reward system. They can work and strive to be successful knowing that once they have demonstrted full competence they will be properly rewarded. To many CETA clients this will be the first time they have received recognition.

A third technique the CETA instructor can incorporate into program management would be to train for full-time and not part-time employment. Since the purpose of CETA is unsubsidized full-time employment, preparing and training for part-time employment can be obtained by the clients

themselves with little or no effort in attending class studies. The instructor must stress that the training they are receiveing leads to full-time unsubsidized employment in a valid occupation.

These are just a few of the techniques that the CETA instructor may incorporate to reduce program drop-outs. For the reader desiring additional information on how to incoporate various strategies to eliminate program drop-outs, it is suggested that they review Monograph #3, #4, #5, and #11 in this series.

Program Design

The design of the client's program also has considerable influence in determining the number of program drop-outs. Experience has shown that for those students who drop out of school, very few of them will return to their traditional school environment. There are a number of different reasons for this fact, however, the primary one seems to be that since the traditional school setting has proved to be a failure experience, the drop-out does not want to return and experience failure again (Magnum, 1978). Part of the failure experience is the result of the program content within the in-school programs that is perceived to have little value. Consequently, it is important that the CETA professonal develop a program for the client in which everything that the client is required to do has value. One way to prove the worth of the client's program is to provide academic credit. The awarding of credit for successful completion of various programs is important and especially true in

our society where credentials, certificates, and degrees are cherished.

A basic program design for the CETA client would include preparation in the areas of academics, skill training, social needs, and emotional needs. The academic component insures that the CETA client will be receiving the proper courses and contents that will enable them to someday obtain the high school diploma. Once having received the high school diploma, it is now possible for the CETA client to receive advanced training which will also provide ample credit and the appropriate degree. The skill training component ensures that the CETA client will be able to function as a productive member of society. This functioning will occur not only in the world of work, but with other family members and peer groups. By developing a program that meets the emotional needs of the CETA client we can address two very important issues. First, we have eliminated the need for the CETA clients to seek assistance in addressing personal issues that could possibly be handled by the individual client themselves. Second, we have reduced the client's dependency on someone other than themselves in making decisions.

The CETA professional must be careful not to design a program that emphasized remediation entirely. While the remedial or basic needs of today's CETA client may be great, it is important that programs do not over-emphasize this

need. However, it is also important that the clients perceive the training program in which they are enrolled as more than elementary in nature.

The skill training component of the client's program must have a considerable amount of thought in its initial design. The CETA professional should develop and design programs for the client in which work experiences relate directly to essential skill training. Too frequently, the CETA professoinal assumes that all skill training must be conducted in the skill center itself. While this may be true for some specific occupations, this is not always the case. It is important that a program be designed only after a study has been made to see which occupations are best taught in a skill center environment. This concept is extremely important especially in times of reduced funding. It is foolish to spend considerable sums of money developing programs to be conducted in the skill center when the same programs could be effectively conducted in an on-the-job training situation.

The program design has other advantages in trying to eliminate potential drop-outs of the CETA client. One concept would be implemented in all programs and would be designed specifically for the non-traditional student. Programs having a history of success are attractive to the non-traditional student. Clients are attracted to these programs and they have a reduced tendency to give up and to drop out. One way to bring recognition to a program is to make extensive use of successful graduates. A technique that the CETA

instructor could use would be to bring back successful program graduates to talk with the new CETA client, explaining how their program helped them and changed their lives. Another technique that could be used by the CETA instructor would be to obtain letters of testimony from employers of graduates. Regardless of the technique used, the CETA instructor should constantly show that the programs can be successful. Success in this area can only increase motivation and reduce potential drop-outs.

Another concept that must be considered in the design of any CETA program is the use of occupational clusters. In some instances skill center offerings do not entirely meet or match the needs of clients that are applying for training. Clients who perceive their needs are not being met will soon drop out. It is also understood that it is impossible to provide every type of occupational training that may exist within an immediate employment area due to the shortage of: funds, facilities, and instructional staff. The use of occupational clusters can eliminate this potential danger by providing various occupational interests. One example may be the building trades cluster in which clients could be cycled into various programs emphasizing carpentry, plumbing, masonry, electricity, and painting. Through the use of the cluster approach, and the willingness of the CETA professional to use extensive on-the-job training environments, numerous client needs can be met with little or no additional cost to the funding agency. The importance of this type of concept is that individual needs of the client are being met. The client perceives the program

as being helpful since they have been provided with a number of different options. The flexibility that is provided the CETA client increases their interest in their current program, and helps maintain program enrollment.

The composition of the various programs also has an impact on the degree of program drop-outs. In the past, severe mistakes have been made in developing and generating specific classes. One mistake that has been made was to limit a particular program within a skill center to disadvantaged students. The problem with this type of program design is that it fails to recognize the advantages of peer modeling. Instead of having access to some success models, classes comprised entirely of disadvantaged students have only unsuccessful models to follow. There soon developes a feeling of frustration and hopelessness among clients. All too soon, enrollee motivation drops and disappointment with the system develops. They soon perceive their CETA experience as being a replication of their traditional education experience. Not wanting to experience failure again, they soon withdraw from the program.

Job Placement/Employability

The job placement/employability component to any CETA program can have a postive influence on reducing program drop-outs. In the past, however, job placement/employability has dealt primarily with preparing the CETA clients for the labor market. While this concept is necessary, it is important that as a contemporary society we

advance one step further. The advancement must be taken to prepare the youth to gain the initial job and to advance within a particular occupation after entry into the labor market. With the rapidly changing job requirements placed on today's worker as a result of increased technology, advancements in the occupation become vital.

To insure that the CETA client is prepared to enter and advance in the labor market it is imperative that we make extensive use of the work experience concept. This work experience concept permits the client to further develop skills that were learned as part of the classroom training program. More importantly, the work experience must be scheduled and designed so that it relates to a realistic effort. By providing a work experience that matches the need of the immediate labor market area we have increased the chances that employment will remain high, placement will be effective, and program drop-outs will be reduced.

In addition to these various components of the job placement/employability component we would also assist the CETA client in developing skills to gain entry level employment. Skills that must be developed to insure success in this area would include developing job seeking and employment application skills. It would not be uncommon to find that many CETA clients have little knowledge about finding a job. Previous jobs that had been held were probably obtained by word-of-mouth or through contact with a close friend. This method is effective as long as the close friend or the immediate contact has a position available. Unfortunately, problems occur when the traditional methods of finding jobs are

no longer effective. When the CETA client is forced to use other techniques to find employment they are at an obvious disadvantage. To overcome this disadvantage, it is important that the employability training program provide the CETA client with the opportunity to complete an employment application. If this application is not completed accurately, it could result in the potential employee not receiving a job. While it may be difficult to give the CETA client a variety of experiences in completing applications it is necessary that the employability instructor prepare the CETA client to complete all important applications.

Facilities

The appearance, design, and structure of the skill center facilities are important to reducing potential drop-out rates. Facilities that are in poor repair or need renovation often leave the CETA client with the impression that the programs offered within the skill center are of poor quality. The client fails to take pride in the institution itself or their self-worth. This situation detracts from the development of a positive, motivating force that will encourage the CETA client to aggressively pursue studies and successfully complete the program.

The use of non-traditional facilities is also recommended for the CETA client. Buildings that closely resemble traditional education classrooms are not effective because of the CETA client's negative experiences associated with such facilities. The CETA professoinal is encouraged to utilize

innovative facility designs. By using designs that do not have a close resemblance to the traditional educatoin facilities the client is better able to take an interest in the institution itself.

The skill center facilities serve two purposes in the development of the CETA client. The first purpose is obviously the location or environment in which the CETA client will receive both skill and employability training. Consequently the shops and classroooms located within the skill center should be modern, well-kept, clean, and have good lighting. The second purpose of the facilities associated with skill centers is that they serve as a "hangout" for the CETA clients enrolled in various programs. This "hangout" concept is extremely important since, personal interaction among the various CETA clients is probably the most effective ingredient that can be used to instill motivation and encourage program completion. As a result, facilities should be conducive for small group gatherings and serve as an environment where the CETA clients can have positive interaction. By permitting the CETA clients flexibility in interacting and also interacting in a modern, clean, well-kept facility the motivation aspect involved with CETA training is greatly increased. The client takes pride in the institution and pride in the facilities in general.

Summary

As the threat of decreased CETA funding continues at the national level and training costs rise, the issue of

accountability will remain a problem for the CETA professional. This is especially true where accountability is linked to program enrollment and positive termination. If the CETA training programs are to withstand the threats of program elimination, a renewed emphasis will have to occur in the area of eliminating client drop-outs. To insure success, all CETA professionals will have to participate in this effort. Unless the client's total training program is designed around their training needs and recognizes the importance of every staff member's input, CETA programs may continue to suffer from unstable enrollments.

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